



Student perceptions of the school environment and its influence on nutrition and physical activity

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the school environment impacts students' nutrition and physical activity. The results informed development of environmental interventions in a community-based participatory research study. In spring 2003, seven focus groups were conducted with 43 students at one ethnically diverse, urban high school. Students answered semi-structured questions about the nutrition and physical activity environment and suggested policy and environmental changes to facilitate healthy eating and physical activity. Resulting transcripts were coded and analyzed for emergent themes using qualitative research software, N6. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using the check-coding method. Final agreement was 94%. These nutrition themes were identified: 1) Cafeteria food is perceived as having low quality and little variety; 2) The open-campus policy allows students access to off-campus vendors perceived as providing better variety and quality; 3) Cost, convenience, and sensory characteristics determine food choice; 4) Limited availability of healthy food and abundance of unhealthy food are barriers to eating healthy; 5) Increasing cafeteria food quality and variety and increasing healthy food options in vending machines would facilitate healthy eating. These physical activity themes were identified: 1) Physical activity occurs in gym classes, sports teams, and independently when school facilities are open; 2) Availability of activities and peer participation encourage physical activity; 3) Poor attitudes among peers discourage participation; 4) Increasing opportunities for activity and access to school facilities would facilitate physical activity. These results are being used by the school community to develop effective environmental and policy approaches to obesity prevention.

Learning Objectives:

- Following this session, the participant will be able to
- 1. Identify two aspects of the school environment that influence nutrition and physical activity among high school students, and
- 2. Describe student-identified policy changes that encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

Keywords: Nutrition, Adolescents

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

I have a significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

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[School Environment: Changing Food and Physical Activity Choices](#)

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